

The Long Walk

By Shirley M. Haws

I understand that for the past thirty years have have had a hard time sleeping. You're troubled with nightmares. I can tell you about them. They're each a little different except for one thing. They are always about a little three year old girl who is lost. Sometimes this little girl is run over by a car, sometimes she freezes, sometimes she starves to death, but she always has that frightening pleading look in her eyes, and those eyes are always piercing into yours begging for help. Yes, I know about your nightmares and I know why you have them though for all these years you've tried to wipe out the memory, you never will until you find out the truth, so your conscience can rest.

It happened in Hailey, Idaho, on a chilly afternoon early in May. You and your brown German Shepherd dog were attending by the side of the road talking to that pretty, dark haired girl you had been wanting to date for so long. You were trying to think of a way to really impress her so that she'd think you were a big man about town. Your chance came in the form of a little blue eyed three year old with blond ringlets hanging down her back. She had been down the road playing with a little friend she'd met.

"Hello, little girl, where are you going?"

"Down to that brown house. My sister liver there, and my Mommy and me are staying with her until she gets a baby."

"No, you're not, see that highway over there? That's where you're going."

"No, I'm not!"

"If you don't, I'll sig my dog on you."

"I'll climb on that girl's shoulder, then he can't get me."

"Oh, but I'm not very tall, but that dow is awfully big. He can jump up that high--easy."

"Now start walking down the highway, and don't stop or even look back, because we'll be watching you, and if you do, my dog'll came after you and tear

you to bits.

Can you remember the look of helpless desperation as the tears started streaming down that little girl's face and she crossed the street and started walking along the side of the busy highway? Each time she would falter as if to turn around, you'd call out: "Keep going or here comes the dog!"

For four hours that little girl stumbled along the side of the road unable to see because of the tears that were continually clouding her vision, escaping for her eyes, and slowly making their way down her cheek to the tip of her chin, then dripping like raindrops to the ground. Her face was streaked with mud, caused from a dirty little fist rubbing the tears away. She got awfully tired, but each time she wanted to stop, she remembered the sharp teeth on that great big dog, and was afraid to turn around or even glance over her shoulder just in case it might have followed her. The thought of it made her walk even faster.

Car after car after car passed, and some even slowed down, but none stopped. The little girl was sure she would never see her mother again, and as she walked she tried to remember each little thing about her so that she would always know just what she looked like. The sun had gone down and it was starting to get dark. Her panic was getting worse at the thought of being all alone at night in a strange country, and each minute that passed made the already big lump in her stomach to grow even bigger.

Then suddenly a small white car was on the road. She looked up as it slowed down like so many other had done, but this time the car stopped, and a gentle voice asked the little girl if she were all right. The relief and thankfulness that someone was finally going to help her was more than she could take, and she crumpled to the ground and was overcome with sobs that shook her whole body. The kind man gently picked the little girl up and carried her to the car. He sat for a long time in the seat holding her close and comforting her by stroking her hair as his body swayed in a rocking motion.

The little girl finally fell into an exhausted sleep and the man laid her beside him in the seat of his coupe. The next thing she knew she was opening her eyes and seeing such a fairy house as she had never seen before. It looked like a playhouse with everything in it a child could ever dream of having. It had a table with benches, a stove, a cupboard with dishes, and even a bed. She was in a bed swing that was connected to each wa.. the man was looking down as her in his kind way.

“Well, hello,” he said, “We’ve found your Mama. When we called the police station in Ketchum, she had been looking for you. They are going there to wait for me to bring you to them. They are so happy to know where you They have been awfully worried. We have hooked the trailer house into the car, and we are ready to take you to her. Shall we go?” Before that kind man stopped for the little girl, she had walked fifteen terrible miles, and the experience was explanted deeply into her mind to stay forever.

A suffering conscience should only bother a person so long before it is relieved, and I feel thirty years is long enough for you to live with yours. You can rest easy because things are fine, and that little girl is grownup and happy. How do I know? Well, because I am that little girl.